

THE GROWTH OF INDIVIDUALISM

179

at any rate the middle of the century, the fixing of prices by municipal authorities and by the Government was regarded with scepticism by the more advanced economic theorists, and towards the end of the century it produced complaints that, since it weakened the farmer's incentive to grow corn, its results were the precise opposite of those intended." As markets widened, the control of the middleman who dealt in wool and grain, though strictly enforced in theory, showed unmistakable signs of breaking down in practice. Gresham attacked the prohibition of usury, and normally stipulated that financiers who subscribed on his inducement to public loans should be indemnified against legal proceedings.⁸¹ Nor could he^well have done otherwise, for the sentiment of the City was that of the merchant in Wilson's Dialogue : " What man is so madde to deliver his moneye out of his owne possession for naughte ? or whoe is he that will not make of his owne the best he can ?"⁸¹ With such a wind of doctrine in their sails men were not far from the days of complete freedom of contract. Most significant of all, economic interests were already appealing to the political theory which, when finally systematized by Locke, was to prove that the State which interferes with property and business

destroys its own title to exist. " All free
 subjects,"
 declared a Committee of the House of
 Commons in
 1604, " are born inheritable, as to their
 land, so also
 to the free exercise of their industry, in
 those trades
 whereto they apply themselves and
 whereby they are
 to live. Merchandise being the chief and
 richest of all
 other, and of greater extent and
 importance than all
 the rest, it is against the natural right and
 liberty of the
 subjects of England to restrain it into the
 hands of some
 few/TM The process by which natural justice,
 imperfectly
 embodied in positive law, was replaced as
 the source
 of authority by positive law which might or
 might not
 be the expression of natural justice, had its
 analogy in
 13